

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 369

CG 018 471

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 TITLE Creativity and Counseling. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Fact Sheet.
 INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
 SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
 PUB DATE 84
 CONTRACT 400-83-0014
 NOTE 3p.
 AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.
 PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Counseling; *Counseling Techniques; *Creativity; Creativity Research; *Psychological Characteristics; Research Needs; Research Problems
 IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

In this fact sheet creativity is defined and stages in the creative process and characteristics of creative persons are discussed. Research approaches to creativity and blocks to the creative process are described. Six creative approaches to integrating creativity into counseling are delineated. (MCF)

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HIGHLIGHTS

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Creativity and Counseling

Creativity — a word that connotes excitement, fun, inspiration, risk, novelty, the unknown, imagination, surprise. A fascinating dimension of mental functioning, creativity has been the subject of intensive research since the 1960s with the result that we are increasingly able to identify the behavioral factors that are common to unusually inventive individuals, as well as the environmental factors that contribute to creative thinking and creative problem-solving.

Definitions of Creativity

While early scholars focused on the creation, the product of creative efforts, researchers since have studied creativity from other perspectives: (a) the creative process, with fairly discrete behavioral stages; (b) the particular constellation of personality characteristics in the creator; and (c) environmental conditions that promote creative activity.

Experts on creativity (Guildford, 1973) agree generally on the phases a person goes through in the creative process:

1. **Preparation** — acquiring skills, background information, resources; sensing and defining a problem.
2. **Concentration** — focusing intensely on the problem to the exclusion of other demands — a trial and error phase that includes false starts and frustration.
3. **Incubation** — withdrawing from the problem; sorting, integrating, clarifying at an unconscious level; often includes reverie, relaxation, solitude.
4. **Illumination** — the Aha! stage, often sudden, involving the emergence of an image, idea, or perspective that suggests a solution or direction for further work.
5. **Verification, elaboration** — testing out the idea, evaluating, developing, implementing, convincing others of the worth of the idea.

These stages are not necessarily distinct and usually involve a complex recycling of the process.

Torrance (1969) defines creativity broadly as the process of sensing a problem, searching for possible solutions, drawing hypotheses, testing and evaluating, and communicating the results to others. He adds that the process includes original ideas, a different point of view, breaking out of the mold, recombining ideas or seeing new relationships among ideas. Moving the focus to the behavioral perspective, Torrance describes four components by which individual creativity can be assessed:

1. **Fluency** — the ability to produce a large number of ideas.
2. **Flexibility** — the ability to produce a large variety of ideas.
3. **Elaboration** — the ability to develop, embellish, or fill out an idea.
4. **Originality** — the ability to produce ideas that are unusual, statistically infrequent, not banal or obvious.

From still another viewpoint, creativity is perceived as three-dimensional (Khatena, 1982), consisting of the person, the environment, and the cosmos — this last component to include the suprarational forces that illumine creativity at the highest or genius levels.

Characteristics of the Creative Person

According to the most extensive research in this field, creative people possess in quantity the abilities identified by Torrance: sensitivity to problems and deficiencies; ability to produce many, varied, and unusual ideas; ability to flesh them out; and ability to perceive in a way different from the traditional or established method. In addition, highly creative people share the following traits: flexibility rather than rigidity, openness to new ideas and experiences, tolerance of ambiguity, a wide range of interests, curiosity, enthusiasm and energy, vivid imaginations, playfulness, commitment and concentration, comfort with change, capacity for hard work, persistence, divergent thinking. Because creativity involves new approaches and the production of something new and untried, it also involves the risk of failure. It follows logically, then, and is supported in the literature, that two characteristics of the creative person are particularly significant: self-confidence, based on a strong self-concept; and independence, the strength to hold fast against disagreement or resistance by others and the courage to persist when others may be threatened by a new idea or discovery.

Research Approaches to Creativity

When researchers attempt to measure this capacity, they must first "index" creativity, that is, decide what they mean by creativity, what dimensions are accessible for identification, and whether these can be operationalized to the extent that they can be measured. Four broad approaches to the assessment of creativity prevail (Leshner, 1973): assessment of the product, the process, the person, and the environment.

1. **Assessment of the product.** Difficulties in this type of assessment include establishing norms or criteria by which to judge the uniqueness of the product; making decisions on ruling out the absurd (time may later accept as creative what may today seem to be absurd); generalizing from one sample of output. The Jackson and Messick (1967) conceptualization does provide a way in which different criteria can be compared.
2. **Assessment of the process.** This has taken two forms: interviewing the creative person to determine attitudinal "sets," and examining facets of the process. Difficulties include standardization of the interview form and the responses, the tendency for interviewees to give desired rather than true responses on self-report forms, pinpointing the definition of creativity to avoid variability in observer



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judgments, bias in favor of a person's background and exposure to the field in performing certain tasks well rather than the measurement of innate creative ability, avoidance of a "test" atmosphere, time required for hand-scoring, reliability of scorers, assessment of a narrowly defined ability, reliance on language or verbal skills. "The Torrance Tests of Creativity" (Torrance, 1966), one of the most well-known and widely-used instruments to measure the creative process, contains a verbal and a figural part. Each is scored on the four criteria of fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality. Like the TTOC, the Wallach and Kogan (1965) creative battery includes both verbal and visual content and is administered without time constraints and in a game-like atmosphere. Also used in this domain is the Remote Associates Test (Mednick & Mednick, 1962).

3. **Assessment of the person.** Difficulties include the likelihood of distortion on self-report forms from dishonesty, desire to give the "correct" answer, or lack of personal insight; need for cooperative subjects; applicability to young age levels; and difficulties between scores in group and individual assessment situations. One of the most frequently used tests for measuring personality traits is the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire, which appears to yield fairly reliable data. Researchers found that several groups of creative people exhibited similar profiles and characteristics on this instrument.
4. **Assessment of the environment.** Difficulties in assessing background information include people's tendency to remember selectively, establishing a control group, and insensitivity to current, ongoing change. The Alpha Biographical Inventory, a 300-item survey which covers areas of family life, developmental history, academic background, and adult life and interests, has proved to be worthwhile as a measurement of environment and a predictor of future creative output.

Generally speaking, researchers agree that students enrolled in courses designed to stimulate creative ability do improve in at least some of the creative abilities being tested, that performance on creative tests can be improved by the use of reward and specialized training, that early family responsibilities and opportunities for independent action encourage creative achievement, that educational experiences are decidedly influential in fostering or suppressing creative potential, that creativity training programs in schools are more effective when teacher involvement is high, that creativity is associated with good mental health.

Blocks to Creativity

Several forces in the groups to which we belong — schools, companies, churches, lodges, corporations — can help or hinder our creativity in various ways.

1. **Fear of failure** — a reward structure that may penalize failure or provide excessive rewards for success, press for immediate success, preference for routine and predictability.
2. **Preoccupation with order and tradition** — excessive reverence for the past.
3. **Resource myopia** — failure to recognize one's own strengths as well as the strengths of other people, lack of appreciation of and trust in human capacities.
4. **Overcertainty** — persistence in behavior that is no longer effective, dogmatism and inflexibility on the part of experts in the group.
5. **Reluctance to exert influence** — desire not to appear pushy, a "don't rock the boat" attitude.
6. **Fear of play** — overseriousness, desire not to appear foolish, squelching of What if? thinking and fantasizing.

We also may experience inhibitors within ourselves. Eminent creative persons and others who have studied the creative thinking process report the following as being among the most

common difficulties encountered in attempting to produce original ideas (Torrance, 1969):

1. Inability to let the imagination roam, to play.
2. Tendency to analyze rather than synthesize.
3. Movement toward too-soon closure.
4. Inability to abandon an earlier image.
5. Distractions from others.
6. Lack of a rich background of information and experience.
7. Preoccupation with private worries.
8. Running out of ideas.

Integration of Creativity Into Counseling

The following creative approaches, when used in the counseling process, can help clients do two things: (1) produce more creative outcomes in decision-making, and (2) use creative processes in planning and goal-setting.

1. **Futurization** — helping people to move away from the present and examine their situation from a futuristic point of view, to open their minds to divergent thinking and possibilities they may not have thought of.
2. **Imagery** — helping people to put themselves into a situation, imagine being there, experience various outcomes; allowing for an incubation period when ideas can have a chance to sort themselves out and recombine in creative ways.
3. **Suspended judgment** — helping people postpone evaluation, which keeps the mind open to new possibilities and options and consideration of alternatives.
4. **Multiple options and choices** — helping people avoid settling on a single choice, expand their options, do some contingency planning.
5. **Whole person resources** — helping people combine logic and rationality with gut-level emotions and feelings in making decisions, pushing less hard for answers, providing more support for What if? responses, for fantasizing and dreaming.
6. **Modeling creative behavior** — allowing people to be independent, letting them experience mistakes, avoiding evaluation, being flexible, rewarding creative behavior, understanding the creative process.

Resource Documents

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Note: In addition to these resource documents, a list of recommended materials is available upon request. Please direct inquiries to ERIC/CAPS User Services, 2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259 (313/764-9492).

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